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ABSTRACT

The Greater Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) Literacy Council (GPLC) is a volunteer-based literacy council that provides adult basic and literacy education services to the area's citizens. The GPLC conducted an action research project to determine whether adding monthly meetings for professional teaching staff and providing opportunities for interaction with other GPLC staff would result in a teaching staff that was more integrated and more mutually supportive. During the project, the GPLC's four professional teachers met four times. They discussed common issues, participated in problem solving, and shared teaching methods. All teachers were scheduled to attend professional development activities, including at least one group activity. The teachers were interviewed and asked to complete an oral questionnaire six months later. All four teachers valued the teacher meetings enough to continue them for the next contract year. All four teachers stated that they valued the meetings for providing an understanding audience for brainstorming and general commiseration. Three of the four teachers found time for additional professional development activities that allowed for interaction with GPLC staff and other literacy professionals. Three teachers stated that the meetings made them feel less isolated, and two stated that the meetings made them feel much more integrated into the agency. (MN)

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PRODUCT

"Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

Project Number 099-99-9010
July 1998-June 1999

Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

Problem statement: Will adding monthly meetings for professional teaching staff and providing opportunities for interaction with other GPLC staff result in a teaching staff more integrated into the agency and more supportive of each other?

Population: teachers

Baseline: Teachers work in isolation from the rest of the staff and often from each other. They have not been closely involved in the kind of team planning that is most common in our agency -- so little of their expertise is transmitted. Nor do they have easy access to the many years of experience in adult education that characterizes our main office staff.

Intervention: Teachers met together four times. The meetings took place in 1999 on February 19, March 19, April 23, and May 21. They discussed common issues,problem-solved, and share teaching methods. All were scheduled to attend professional development activities, at least one as a group.

Data collection strategies: Personal interviews at a scheduled evaluation and a questionnaire given orally six months later.

Results: All four of the teachers valued the teachers meetings enough to continue them for the next contract year. All valued having an understanding audience for brainstorming and general commiseration. Three found time for additional professional development activities which allowed for interaction with GPLC staff and other literacy professionals. Three felt less isolated and two felt much more integrated in the agency.

II. PROBLEM

Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) is a volunteer-based literacy council. It provides adult literacy, family literacy, English as a Second Language, workplace, and adult basic education services to the least educated and most in need citizens of the Greater Pittsburgh area. Although many of our students give the GED as their long term goal, few are at the "GED Level" (9th to 12 grade) when they enter the program. Most enter at the intermediate ABE (5th to 8th grade) level. Last year about 35% entered at the literacy (0-4) level.

When GPLC was founded in 1976, it was an all-volunteer agency. Since 1982, when it outgrew its all-volunteer structure, it has expanded to employ a staff of thirty with an annual

student base of about 1400. Administrative functions and some classes are housed at our main office in East Liberty, an inner-city neighborhood. Nine neighborhood or community offices are scattered throughout the county. These are staffed by area coordinators who generally work alone in small offices. However, they meet with each other monthly and with the whole staff at staff meetings. The first staff meeting of the month is mandatory for them; the second is optional depending on the subject matter. They are also involved in many committees and many teams.

Our service area is chiefly urban or suburban. Though some classes are taught by staff professionals, volunteers continue to serve the great majority of our students. About 350 new volunteers are trained each year with 500 active at any point in time. Most of our professional staff is involved in recruiting, training, and supporting the students and tutors in the volunteer-based program. A few are responsible for managing special projects which are separate from our base program. In the group of support people for our education program, many do teach students, but not as their primary responsibility. On average, those who teach do so about four hours a week often in workplace programs or special projects.

As the program director of GPLC, I am responsible for the direction and quality of GPLC's programming including on-going improvement initiatives. I am also responsible for the hiring and direct supervision of about half of the staff. I am responsible for most of the other "program people" indirectly.

The number of professionals who primarily teach rather than coordinate or support volunteers has increased recently. In 1992 only one staff member was assigned as a full time teacher. This class was taught at our main office, and we had daily contact with this teacher. She was very integrated into the life of the agency and was involved in many special projects with other staff members. Both the original teacher of the class and her successor were promoted to management positions within the organization. In 1995 we added another teacher, but her class was at a remote location; in 1996 we added one more; in 1997-98 our in-house class was moved to an off-site location, and we added a second teacher for this class. We now have four professional staff who are full-time teachers -- mostly at remote locations. We expect to add at least one other teacher in 1999-2000.

Most of these teachers are unable to come to staff meetings because they have teaching responsibilities at staff meeting times. They work in isolation from the rest of the staff and often

from each other. They have not been closely involved in the kind of team planning that is most common in our agency -- so little of their expertise is transmitted. Nor do they have easy access to the many years of experience in adult education that characterizes our main office staff. Staff development for these teachers is sporadic at best.

We still behave as an all volunteer agency, just an unusually large and "sophisticated" one, and we simply haven't adjusted to having professional staff who primarily teach and whose schedules are therefore less flexible than those of our administrative or coordinating staff.

I felt as I began this project that if our teachers became more of a team themselves in the way our area coordinators are and, as a group, more a part of our overall team, we would be an agency with a common approach and a common mission, and steadily growing expertise. As it is, some of the teachers don't really understand what the rest of the agency does. We have gotten into a situation where we have excellent teachers who could be doing in-services for our coordinating staff and our tutors (taking some pressure off of our specialist positions) but who have no contact with this part of the program. We also as an agency emphasize professional development for our volunteer support staff and we provide little (and demand little) of our teaching staff. Certainly we have made no attempt to identify or develop any base line approach or skills for the teaching staff.

What is the significance?

If the teachers had a network in which they supported and informed each other, participated in professional activities appropriate to them as a group and as individuals, and had a representative to the rest of the staff, my own job would be easier because I would feel that this part of the agency was growing in a planned and reasonable fashion, not like Topsy ---where teachers are hired as needed, briefly oriented and then thrown out into the field and, if not forgotten, largely ignored -- until a problem develops.

III. PLANNING

In December of every year I have an meeting with all staff that report to me directly. These meetings have two purposes. The first part of the meeting is a formal work evaluation for the previous year, and an overall rating is given. Since all of our raises are based on merit, this part of the meeting is very important. The second part of the meeting is more informal. The idea is simply

to touch base, to see if the employee has any issues that need to be discussed. It's an opportunity to check in on big things like general job satisfaction or changes that the employee thinks would benefit our systems. It is also an opportunity for employees to mention smaller problems or needs that have arisen in the course of work. These meetings can last from one to two hours.

This year (December 1998) I asked the teaching staff if they would be willing to participate in my research project by setting up at least four teachers' meetings and by attending the Math as Problem Solving Module which I would schedule at our main office. Most of the attendees would be GPLC employees but it was to be open for teachers from other agencies.

As a baseline I asked each of the teachers these questions:

1. Do you feel you understand the functions of most of the staff by name and job description?
2. Do you feel you are aware of what's going on at GPLC -- i.e. special projects and professional development opportunities?
3. How many professional development activities did you attend last year?
4. How connected do you feel with GPLC and its staff?
5. Who supports you in your work?

Teacher One works in two sites: with a SPOC class downtown four mornings a week and with an ABE/GED class in the main office four afternoons a week. Teacher two works only with the SPOC class. Two of the teachers are family literacy teachers who work at different sites (Teachers 3 and 4). They meet occasionally when they bring their students together for special projects or events, and they speak occasionally on the phone.

The first question brought various replies. Teacher One teacher said, "There are a few whose jobs I don't understand. Sometimes I sort of know what the job is, but not the person at all or vice versa." Teacher Two said simply, "No." Three said, "Only those I work with like the reading specialist and the receptionist." The fourth felt that he understood the job functions very well and had interacted with most of the main office staff and some coordinators.

Question 2: All of the teachers felt out of the loop to some extent and were concerned about

information flow and timely awareness of professional development opportunities. As for special projects, Teacher One was aware of ALMA and Literacy Centers. Two is on the program improvement team so has some understanding of EQUAL and what is going in that team. However, she was almost completely unaware of other special projects such as AIM, ALMA, What Works, and the Crossroads project. Teacher Three had virtually no contact with other aspects of GPLC and very limited information. Teacher Four was involved in the Student Fellowship Group and Literacy Centers and so had that connection. The SPOC teachers and the family literacy teachers knew very little about each other's classes and had met each other only in passing.

Question 3: The teachers had engaged in very few professional development activities in 1998. Teacher One attended an institute for new teachers. Teacher Two had attended the Case Management Module as part of program improvement team activities. Teacher Three attended a two and a half day advanced training course in Louisville designed for family literacy teachers. Teacher four, who has been on staff the longest, attended two conferences. They averaged about 18 hours of professional development time, much below the 45 hour average for the rest of the staff.

Question 4: Teacher One works with Teacher Two for some hours everyday. They have become a team, and a support for each other. Teacher One feels fairly connected because she works a few hours in the main office four days a week. Teacher Two really only connects through the program improvement team, and that just since September. She had been into the office only three times in eight months, and had no other interaction with staff. She thought everyone was very nice, but they were very "undifferentiated" to her. She was very aware of the mission of the agency, however, and it is what attracted her to her current job. Teacher Three is in much the same position. She has come into the office rarely, and when she does it is on Friday afternoons when few people are there. She also mentioned that because her population is so difficult, handling their problems and instruction is a "lonely" job, but she added that she relished the challenge and the difference she could make. Teacher four felt the same way, but seemed more demoralized. The difficulties were not, for him, balanced by enough tangible rewards--in changes in student behavior or in student progress.

Question 5: All four of the teachers mentioned (tactfully) support by their supervisor. The SPOC teachers (Teachers 1 &2) mentioned each other. Teacher three mentioned her AmeriCorps members. Teacher Four mentioned a colleague from another agency who works with him one or two days a week.

All of the teachers expressed an unreserved willingness to attend the meetings. I told staff that I did not wish to be prescriptive about what happened at their teachers' meetings, but I asked that they use the meetings to share information and expertise, and perhaps decide on professional development activities for the group. I had originally intended that the teachers attend staff meetings on a rotating basis, but this proved too difficult to schedule. One of the four did attend the first staff meetings of the month from January through May.

I asked that they attend the Math as Problem Solving Module because I wanted them to have some training in common in an area where no one considered himself or herself an expert. I thought that this would give the teachers another opportunity to interact, but in a setting in which they were learning new material together rather than sharing.

The teachers backgrounds are very different. One has a doctoral degree in English education with close to twenty years of teaching experience in high school and college; one has a masters in adult education and about a year and a half of teaching experience; one is a master's candidate in adult education with a good deal of practical experience; one has a bachelor's degree in elementary education with less than three years of adult education experience. None are math specialists and it is an area where they all could easily admit that professional development was needed.

The criteria for success for this project is a simple one arising from the perceived problem. If the intervention is successful, most of the teachers (i.e. 3 out of 4) will indicate on the post survey that they feel more fully integrated into the agency, have shared expertise more, have found common ground for professional development, and now perceive a collegial support network where little or none existed before.

There were no outside approvals necessary to set up these meeting. I have the power within my own job description and program responsibilities to conduct this project. The only constraints

were in scheduling time for meetings that would not take the teachers away from their work at crucial times. I left this scheduling entirely in the hands of the teachers. They met twice in our main office, and twice at restaurants downtown (a central location for them) for lunch meetings.

A brief restatement of the problem: Will adding monthly meetings for professional teaching staff and providing opportunities for interaction with other GPLC staff result in a teaching staff more integrated into the agency and more supportive of each other?

IV. ACTION

One of the teachers was made responsible for scheduling the meetings and for keeping informal notes about discussions and activities within the meetings. The meetings took place in 1999 on February 19, March 19, April 23, and May 21.

The first meeting was at the main office and was spent in getting to know each other. The teacher of the downtown class had never really spoken to the two family literacy teachers and knew very little about their program. The teacher who works with her had met both of the family literacy teachers, but knew little about their work or the challenges they faced. They discussed recruitment problems in the family literacy program and retention problems in both programs. Since both programs work with outside case managers, they discussed issues they had in common such as disagreements between the teachers and case workers/managers about the best course for individual students.

The second meeting was also at the main office and the discussion centered around the need for more up-to-date computers to support instruction particularly at the SPOC site. Although both the SPOC students and the family literacy students use the GPLC Computer Center, the SPOC teachers and the family literacy teachers felt strongly that students should be able to practice what they learn at the Computer Center in their own classrooms. One of the family literacy teachers had several newish PC's and a power McIntosh which he used extensively -- so he strongly supported the other teachers position. They again discussed recruitment especially for the main office GED class. One of the family literacy teachers had briefly been a coordinator so he suggested ways that she could get a better response from the coordinators who are responsible for referring students to her class. The family literacy classes take a long (eight week) break in the summer, and the other two teachers indicated that all full time teachers need a break greater than the standard two week

vacation.

The third and fourth meetings took place in restaurants at lunch time. The third meeting returned to the issue of recruitment. The SPOC teachers mentioned that they felt very lucky to have mandated students so that recruitment was someone else's problem. Once a student entered a SPOC program they were not allowed to simply leave. If their students were often absent, they were sanctioned by SPOC and by the welfare department. The teacher of the less successful of the two family literacy program discussed "the negative atmosphere" at his site.

In April and May the teachers and the administrator were scheduled to attend the Math as Problem Solving Module together. One of the teachers was ill and unable to attend either session, and the administrator became ill and missed the second session. Three teachers completed the module. There were several other GPLC staff and AmeriCorps members taking the module as well as literacy professionals from other agencies. It was an opportunity for us to work together in a collegial way and provided an opportunity for the teachers to come into the main office for training. It was also fun and required out of the box thinking for all of us no matter what our level of experience. We were able to laugh with, and maybe at, each other a bit. For Teacher Two, it was a rare opportunity to spend time in the main office and to get know some of the staff and to get a sense of the working atmosphere of the office. The module was scheduled for a Friday morning; planning time for two of the teachers; students of the other teachers went to the Computer Center.

The fourth and final meeting centered around the future of the group and whether they wished to continue meeting. They decided to resume meeting in the fall and continue on a monthly or possibly bimonthly basis. One of the family literacy teachers who is very entrepreneurial spent some time explaining and getting feed back on a proposal that she had written to start a neighborhood afterschool program that would also offer services to parents. Apparently there was some discussion of salary concerns along the lines of, "This is such a great place to work; too bad it doesn't pay better."

V. RESULTS

At the end of the cycle of meetings, I reinterviewed the four teachers. Two were interviewed face to face, and two were interviewed by phone. The same questions were asked of all four.

1. What is your usual way of getting information about what is happening at GPLC?

The three teachers who do not attend staff meetings all listed staff meeting minutes as their best means of current information. None suggested that they were getting information about GPLC activities in greater detail because one of them attended staff meetings--perhaps because their meetings do not closely parallel staff meetings. One suggested that minutes with date-sensitive information should be mailed to staff who aren't able to come to meetings or to pick up mail often. (This staff person and her students had very nearly missed our annual awards luncheon.)

Other responses were: asking when I need information, interaction with other staff, newsletters, and memos. None of the them mentioned the teachers' meetings specifically as a new way of getting information; however, three sited "interaction" as a good means of getting information.

2. Which GPLC staff members do you communicate with most regularly?

This produced a wide variety of answers. The two SPOC teachers who work together four mornings a week listed each other first. The one who has no "main office time" listed in addition only her supervisor and the office receptionist. The other listed the education specialist who assigns JTPA students to her afternoon class, two area coordinators who also recommend students for this class, and the receptionist. The family literacy teacher who most rarely gets to the office listed her supervisor first, then the AmeriCorps supervisor (she works closely with two AmeriCorps members.), then the reading specialist who does assessments for her, and of course, the receptionist. The second family literacy teacher listed only the education specialist (credited as a mentor) and the other family literacy instructor, mostly through phone contacts.

This was not a dramatic change from the initial interview, but all had some sense of closeness to GPLC support staff. All mentioned that they wouldn't hesitate now to pick up the phone and ask one of their teachers'-group for help.

3. How often do you communicate with your supervisor? What are the usual occasions for communication? Who usually initiates contact?

Teacher 1 works in a downtown location four mornings a week and in our office four afternoons a week. She replied in this way, "As often as necessary, once a week maybe.

Occasions are what's going on in SPOC or the GED class, monthly reports. They are usually initiated by me but could be either, sometimes a third party is involved."

Teacher 2 works in a downtown location five days an week and very rarely comes to our office. She replied, " About twice a month by phone. Occasions are issues at work, contract obligations, interpreting our responsibility, sometimes for guidance (but rarely now that I've worked here longer), sometimes development opportunities. Initiation is 50-50."

Teacher 3, who works in a very remote location and is supported directly by only one or two AmeriCorps members, replied, "At least three to five times a month, and more often if there is any sort of crisis. Occasions are approval on various projects, information on program, to see if everything is going as it should. Can be initiated by both. When you (the supervisor) get in touch with me first, it's usually information you need for proposals, immediate information."

Teacher 4 works in a remote location five days a week. He tutors a JTPA student twice a week in our main office in the late afternoon. Because a staff member from another agency does a parenting session for his students once a week on Thursday mornings, he is able to attend staff meetings at least once a month. He replied, "At least once at week. Occasions are pressing issues or budget issues or special events. They are usually initiated by me."

4. What do you see as the disadvantages of working in a "remote" location?

Teacher 1: "I sometimes feel detached from GPLC as a whole; our SPOC students don't see us as any different from the SPOC staff."

Teacher 2: "You're not with your colleagues. They are nice people so that is unfortunate. I'm mostly too busy to notice, but I miss feedback and having someone see if I'm doing a good job or a bad job. It's energizing to have visitors. I really enjoyed the day recently when you dropped in for a while."

Teacher 3: "I miss important information."

Teacher 4. " It's the sense of isolation, of feeling alone."

5. Are there any advantages?

Teacher 1: "You have the freedom to try different things without witnesses, without anyone knowing whether it fell flat or not."

Teacher 2: "Autonomy is not a bad thing, basically part of being a teacher. I don't want someone

second guessing me."

Teacher 3: "Nobody is watching me every minute. I have a sense of freedom and being on my own responsibility. I can be an entrepreneur - but with back-up."

Teacher 4: "You're more autonomous, but that's a double-edged sword also. I'm not sure if a move I make is proper. I can be unsure and that makes me uneasy."

6. What events or professional development activities have you attended so far this year (1999) that allow you to interact with other GPLC staff? (or with other literacy professionals?)

Teacher 1: "the math module, the PAACE conference . . . I was with both GPLC staff and others."

Teacher 2 : the math module, the teachers' focus group for the Indicators of Program Quality, the program improvement team. Only the program improvement team was all GPLC staff."

Teacher 3: "Nothing so far this year -- the advanced family literacy training last summer (1998) I'm going again this summer. This training lets me mingle with people from all over the U.S. It's very important to me. It makes me ready to start again. I think I went to one staff meeting."

Teacher 4: "Lockhaven POC (point of contact) training. I shared information with the data base manager about LITPRO. I learned about PLATO. I can pass that on. The math module . . the Family Literacy Day. . . I attend at least one staff meeting a month."

7. How many meetings with other GPLC teachers have you attended this year? Have these been a positive experience?

All of the teachers said that they had attended all four scheduled meetings. One of the family literacy teachers mentioned that she had met with the family literacy team from the other site (teacher 4 and his colleague from another agency) several times during the year.

Teacher 1: "The meeting got us communicating as teachers, first venting and then finding common ground. We were able to discuss issues we all have such as retention and finding new ways to do things. We shared ideas and materials, problems and solutions."

Teacher 2: "We confirmed with each other that our hearts are in the right places; we shared obstacles. . . I have it easier than the family literacy teachers because my class is

mandated. We (SPOC teachers) have it easier because we have a stick -- but they have only carrots. We all believe that helping this population is a most important thing to do."

Teacher 3: "We got to talk about retention, recruitment, lesson plans -- especially writing and math -- everything from soup to nuts."

Teacher 4: "I got to know the other teachers, what they did. We compared notes and frustrations. For me they were like therapy sessions. It was good to get to know them."

8. Have you felt more or less connected with the organization as a whole this year than last?

Teacher 1: "A little bit more. I get what (the family literacy teachers) do. I know better who everybody is and what they do. "

Teacher 2: "Yes, because I've gone to more professional development activities. Even though I'm off-site, people make you feel like you're there every day. I'm more aware of the congeniality of the agency."

Teacher 3: "Less, actually. I was away from work from October through most of January because I had a baby, and even since I got back it's been hard to balance everything. The teachers' meeting helped me to feel more connected with teachers who are teaching low income families. I know I'm not alone. I know the agency is with me. I know that I can pick up the phone and holler when I need help."

Teacher 4: "Less because of the way things have gone. I wasn't happy with my classes, too few committed students. I feel less useful. I feel on the periphery, more isolated. I think it's the cumulativeness of two difficult years."

9. Will you continue the meetings next year?

All of the teachers indicated that they had decided to resume the meetings in August.

10. Comparing this year to last, do you feel more or less supported/isolated?

Teacher 1: "I feel less isolated, a combination of being here longer and meeting with teachers. There are some advantages in meeting alone with teachers. All have about the same issues, dealing with case manger type persons (whether SPOC or welfare), retention, and recruitment. Getting a different viewpoint form someone who knows exactly where we're

coming from as opposed to an administrator. The meetings were more of a problem solving group."

Teacher 2: "Less isolated. I've been here longer, and I know more people. In the teachers' meetings, we could complain about money, time, the problems in the work . . . but they weren't ever just gripe sessions."

Teacher 3: "Less isolated, but I never really felt isolated. I always had AmeriCorps members. The staff was really helpful and supportive after the baby, letting me do things flexibly. This year everything's not getting done the way I like it. I just have to take my time and slow down . . . and it will all come out. I think that whoever is working outside the office needs to come together and talk with each other in monthly meetings and on the phone. The help is even more psychological than practical."

Teacher 4: "More isolated. I've had two difficult years in a row. I feel I could contribute so much more."

The project was mostly successful: All four of the teachers valued the teachers meetings enough to continue them for the next fiscal year. All of the teachers valued having an understanding audience for brainstorming and general commiseration. All, except the new mother, found time for additional professional development activities which allowed for interaction with GPLC professionals and staff from other literacy providers. (She will go to an advanced training in her field this summer.) Having a closer relationship with each other did help three of the teachers feel less isolated . . . but the circumstances of the fourth's teaching situation -- and his own individual response to it -- were more significantly isolating for him than the benefits derived from the meetings. The meetings provided a platform for discussion of the difficulties at his site and with his students, but there didn't appear any outcomes from these sessions that were weighty enough to have an impact on his circumstances or his morale. He was morose for most of the year -- even though he attended at least one staff meeting a month and a fairly wide range of professional development and informational activities.

All of the teachers indicated fairly regular interaction with their supervisor. "Are you satisfied with the quantity and quality of supervision which you are given?" didn't seem a fair question coming from the supervisor. I compromised by asking more matter of fact questions. All

of the teachers indicated that they communicated with their supervisor several times a month. All saw advantages in the autonomy that comes with "isolation' but one missed the fresh influences that come from visits, and the one who was least satisfied with his work felt the autonomy was a little dangerous because he couldn't be sure "if a move I make is proper."

VI. REFLECTION

The least appealing finding is always the ambiguous "yes and no" one. Yes, the teachers' meetings do increase the opportunities for collegial interaction, and the teachers do like that. Do they feel less isolated and more integrated into the agency as a result of the meetings? They feel less isolated, but not necessarily more connected to the agency. That seems to depend more on individual temperament and circumstance. The teacher who attends staff meetings regularly is the one who feels most isolated and marginalized. He also comes to the main office often to pick up mail or to meet with a one-to-one student. (This is in addition to his family literacy class.) The teacher coping with picking up the reins after a maternity leave (and the continuing challenge of managing the needs of a small baby and a demanding class) feels that she has more support than ever, but still feels less connected with the agency than before --even though more connected with her peers. The two who do feel more connected this year attribute this both to the range of professional development activities that they have attended and to the teachers meetings. This was part of the intent of the project, to try to engage the teachers with colleagues way from their work sites.

The number of other staff that the teachers communicate with continues to be fairly low, but is better than before. Through work-related and professional development activities, most now have a nodding acquaintance with most of the main office staff and a few coordinators. Three work closely with at least two other staff members (plus the receptionist, of course). One even refers to the education specialist as his mentor. The SPOC teacher stills sees routinely only the teacher who works with her part time and the members of the program improvement team. However, she has become very aware of the quality and "congeniality" of her colleagues.

The plan to have teachers attend staff meetings on a rotating basis did not work out this year. This needs to be revisited, and perhaps a firm policy put in place that teaching staff attend a certain number of staff meetings a year. (Administratively, this will be a problem.) Intuitively, I

still believe that staff meetings are the best way to get a sense of who's who and what is going on. Although all the teachers read the minutes and get information, they miss the opportunity for discussion -- and the influence on policy that discussion affords.

One unintended result of this project was our first written overview of all of our special projects and affiliations. As were discussing the teachers' need for information about GPLC, other staff indicated that we are involved in so many things that even "old" main office staff couldn't keep up with all of the acronyms and special projects. We then produced an eight page booklet which detailed each of our involvements and projects and the staff contact person who knew most about it. This has proven really useful for all staff -- but especially for newer staff members.

It doesn't seem to me that more interaction with the supervisor is an important issue -- all seem to interact with the supervisor often. However, talking about issues is not the same as an on-site visit with students and teachers and supervisor interacting together. Very few of these occurred in 1998-99 (no more than one or two per site).

Perhaps regular visits from a range of staff might result in a greater sense of inclusion. There could be almost as many pretexts for such visits as there are staff positions (The Student Support Specialist could do orientations and invite students into the Fellowship Group; Reading Specialists could do in-service workshops for teachers and students; the AmeriCorps Coordinator could talk about service opportunities.) I guess ultimately the teachers' meetings combined with opportunities to meet with other staff through professional development activities still seem to be the best way of connecting our staff so that we all have a sense that in whatever location or setting we are one agency with one common mission of service to students and leadership in literacy. Next year, I will have all staff who work out of the main office attend at least two staff meetings. At one of these, they will be asked to do a brief presentation to introduce their sites and activities. The area coordinators do this now, and it seems to work in keeping everyone in touch will our far-flung one-to-one program.